

Conference Paper

Verbal and Nonverbal Factors Influencing the Success of *Da'wah* Communication By Ustadz Abdul Somad

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Abstract

Da'wah is the term used to refer to the process of spreading information about Islam by a *da'i* (a Muslim communicator). Indonesia, as the country with the biggest Muslim population in the world has produced a large number of *da'i* who gain popularity in either, local, national, or international scale. Ustadz Abdul Somad is one among the most popular *da'i* from Indonesia who in the last few years has attracted audience across various social economic, educational, and political backgrounds. Driven by the popularity gained by Abdul Somad which outruns most other *da'i* in Indonesia, this study aims to investigate the factors influencing the success of his *da'wah* communication. This study applied a descriptive qualitative approach using documentation and interview as the instruments of data collection. The findings show that there are two main factors behind the success of his *da'wah* communication, First, the verbal factors which include comprehensive reference and the language choice. Second, the nonverbal one, which in this case is the use of various platforms for *da'wah* dissemination.

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1. Introduction

Da'wah is an effort to invite people to always hold on to Islamic teachings to gain happiness in this life and hereafter (Jafar, 2010). Similar to this definition, Mubarak (1999) defines *da'wah* as a way to invite people to the right path of Islam so that they can live happily in the world and hereafter. Someone who does the act of *da'wah* is called as "*Da'i*" or Islamic preachers. They have deepened their understanding of Islamic teachings and are committed to share their knowledge to others. For this reason, Islamic preachers should have good communication skills to communicate effectively in front of their audience (*mad'u*). *Da'wah* can be categorized as successful when the content of *Da'wah* is followed by the listeners. In other words, *da'wah* aims to influence people to act in accordance with what the *Da'i* conveys in his *da'wah*.

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Da'wah is very important for Muslims since it is a way to help Muslims understand their religion better, especially the Muslims in Indonesia as a country with the highest Muslim population in the world. Approximately, in 2015, Islam has 1.8 billion adherents, making up about 24.1% of the world population. Muslim population in Indonesia is the largest in the world, with approximately 225 million Muslims, and 87.2% of Indonesian population identifying themselves as Muslim in 2010 (BPS, 2010). Despite the number of Muslims in Indonesia outweighs the percentage of other religions, Indonesia is not an Islamic state, instead a secular state whose government officially recognizes six formal religions (Martin, 2004). This fact is one contributing factor to the establishment of Islamic boarding schools that produced Islamic preachers in Indonesia.

Islamic preachers (*Da'i*) have played important roles in spreading Islam in Indonesia, for example; Walisongo (the nine Islamic preachers). In the 14th century, Walisongo spread the Islamic teachings in East Java, Central Java, and West Java (Ricklefs, 1991). They encouraged the local people to adhere Islam without any force. Today, in this advanced technological era, *da'wah* can be done without face to face meeting. With the presence of social networking sites and social media, many Islamic preachers do their *da'wah* on Instagram, Facebook, and twitter or YouTube, and they are well-known in local, national or international scale. Some of them are; Yusuf Mansur, Gus Mus, Aa Gym, Arifin Ilham, Syekh Ali Jaber, Anwar Zahid, Ulil Absar Abdalla, Hanan Attaki, and Abdul Somad.

Among these *Da'is*, who are also called as Ustadz in Indonesia, in the past few years, Ustadz Abdul Somad (UAS) has gained more popularity compared to other *Da'is*. It can be seen from the number of his *da'wah* subscribers on YouTube and followers on Instagram. Since finishing his study in 2002 from the University of Al Azhar, Cairo, UAS started to gain public attention since he uploaded his *da'wah* videos on YouTube and Instagram. Up to this point, UAS has 7.2 million followers on Instagram (Tribun-Timur.com, 2019) and 38.7 million people who watched his *da'wah* videos on YouTube. In addition, he can attract the audience of different social economic, educational, and political backgrounds.

Related to this phenomenon, this current study tries to investigate the factors influencing the success of UAS's *da'wah* communication. Of course, several researches related to *da'wah* have been conducted in Indonesia. However, none of them discusses about the factors contributing to the success of *da'wah* in Indonesia. A study conducted by Aini and Husna (2018) about the type of *da'wah* communication used by *da'wah* workers in conveying the message of Islam to the aboriginals shows that to develop effective communication, the *da'wah* workers do not only apply verbal communication,

but also non-verbal communication to introduce the concept of Islam to the aborigines. In Indonesia, Murthado (2017) has studied about the empowerment of social media for *da'wah* in Medan, but he did not discuss about the factors contributing to the success of *da'wah*. Thus, the study related to factors contributing to the success of *da'wah* dissemination is considered important since the results of this study will be beneficial to be used as a reference for other Islamic preachers in Indonesia. By understanding the contributing factors, other Islamic preachers will have better communication skills in delivering their *da'wah* successfully. Thus, it is expected that the listeners follow the content of *da'wah* and behave in the right path of Islam and be happy in this world and hereafter.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Da'wah and communication

Literally, *da'wah* means “issuing a summon” or “making an invitation”. It functions to invite people to understand Islam through dialogue (Online, 2018). A Muslim who has deep understanding about Islamic teachings and performs the *da'wah* is called as *Da'ī* (Islamic preachers). However, a Muslim whose profession is not a *da'ī* can also share his understanding about Islamic teachings, for example; a father who reminded his son about the obligation of Friday prayer for men in Islam. Even though he might work as an entrepreneur, he should not wait for a *da'ī* to teach his son about Islam.

Da'wah involves communication which encourages social interaction between *da'ī* and his audience (*mad'u*) (Mubarok, 1999). For this reason, a *da'ī* should have a wide range of knowledge related to Islamic teachings, the social behavior of human beings, and the socio-cultural environment where they live. It is important to make sure that the message of *da'wah* is conveyed successfully since nowadays' society should find the solution to overcome the challenge of communication intensity (Ekayati & Saniaty, 2018).

To achieve this goal, in the Qur'an An-Nahl: 125, it is stated that:

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجِدِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ ۝١٢٥

It means: “Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation and have disputations with them in the best manner; surely your Lord best knows those who go astray from His path, and He knows best those who follow the right way.”

From the verse of the Qur'an above, it can be understood that "wisdom", "good instruction" and "arguing well" are three things needed in *da'wah*.

2.2. Factors contributing to the success of Da'wah

It is stated that *da'wah* will be delivered successfully if the message contained in *da'wah* is fully explained by the *Da'l* (Mubarok, 1999). The success of *da'wah* can also be seen if *Mad'u* (the audience) do the message of *da'wah* conveyed by the *da'l*. For instance, when a *da'l* reminds the importance of performing five-time prayer a day in Islam, and the people who listen to his *da'wah* (the *Mad'u*) perform the message, it means the *da'wah* has been successfully communicated.

Rachmat (1986) mentions several things that make a success *da'wah*:

1. The audiences understand the message of the *da'wah*.
2. The audiences are happy with the knowledge they learned from a *da'wah*.
3. The *da'wah* changes the audiences' behavior to be better than before, for example; being ignorant to be more sympathy.
4. The *da'wah* results in a good relationship between a *da'l* and his audiences, for example; from a teacher, becoming a friend.
5. The *da'wah* improves the audiences' action toward their daily life, for example; being perplexed to perform prayer to be more diligent to do it.

Besides these improvements, other factors contributing to a success of *da'wah* are verbal and non-verbal communication. Since communicating skill plays an important role in *da'wah*, the factors that influence the success of communication also apply to the success of *da'wah* (proselytizing). In their article, Aini and Husna (2018) explain that *da'l* should choose an appropriate type of communication to perform the *da'wah*. They also add that verbal communication might involve the use of certain language medium to convey the message of *da'wah* to the recipient through verbal medium, such as; public speaking, sermon, dialogue and discussion. They furthermore propose the procedures of verbal communication, namely; the topic of conversation should be about something good and beneficial, the communicator should avoid mentioning unbeneficial things, he is truthful, does not expose others' weakness, does not say bad things and look down on others, and he observes the ethics when differing in views with others (Aini & Husna, 2018). Meanwhile, the non-verbal communication is related to facial expression, eyes

and body movement which could have a big influence in communication (Mc Auley, 1988).

2.3. Ustadz Abdul Somad (UAS)

As a country with a higher number of Muslims, Indonesia has many Islamic preachers who are well-known in national and international scale. Ustadz Abdul Somad, popularly called UAS, is one among Islamic preachers in Indonesia who have attracted peoples attention in the past few years. Abdul Somad Batubara (born May, 1977) is an Indonesian Islamic preacher and Ulama from Asahan, North Sumatra. He is known for his lectures on various religious issues, especially regarding hadith studies and Islamic jurisprudence. He is currently on service as a lecturer at the State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim II (UIN SUSKA) Riau.

Ustadz Abdul Somad went through his elementary education at Al-Washliyah. Then, he continued his education at Mu'alimin al-Washliyah Medan. In 1993, he studied at Nurul Falah, and completed it in 1996. In 1998, Ustadz Abdul Somad was among 100 students who received scholarships granted by the Egyptian government for Indonesian students studying at Al Azhar University. In 2004, the Moroccan government provided him scholarship for post-graduate education at Dar al Hadith al Hasaniyyah Institute which annually receives 20 students, consisted of 15 Moroccans and five foreigners.

3. Research Method

This study applied a descriptive qualitative approach using documentation and interview as the instrument of data collection. The main data source for this study was the video of UAS's *da'wah* published on YouTube (www.youtube.com). In addition, 4 people (2 men and 2 women) were invited as the participants of the study for interview session. The four participants were selected based on the criterion of YouTube subscribers who watch UAS *da'wah* video regularly. The data gained from the interview were analyzed using content analysis. Meanwhile, the data from documentation were analyzed using document analysis technique as suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014).

4. Result and Discussion

After analyzing the data, the results indicate that there are two main factors contributing to the success of Ustadz Abdul Somad's *da'wah*, namely; verbal and non-verbal factors.

The verbal factors include comprehensive reference and the language choice. Meanwhile, the non-verbal factor is the use of various platforms for *da'wah* dissemination.

4.1. Verbal factors

The popularity of Ustadz Abdul Somad is supported by two verbal factors; (1) the humors and playful words he likes to use when conveying his *da'wah* in front of the audience (*mad'u*), and (2) his rigorous explanation based the Qur'an and Hadith and his ability to link his explanation to current situation and the life of recipients (*mad'u*) with Islamic teachings in order to create friendly environment in his *da'wah*. With the use of unique rhetoric and humor that attract layman and political leader, his humor and deep knowledge have influenced people of different social backgrounds to feel happy with the knowledge they got from his *da'wah*, and it is one of several signs for a success of *da'wah* dissemination explained by Rachmat (1986).

In delivering his *da'wah*, Ustadz Abdul Somad disseminates the Islamic teachings, provides solution and answer to the questions asked by his audience in a way that can be understood by his audience. For examples, when talking in front of Acehnese, Ustadz Abdul Somad speaks Aceh language, when given opportunity to talk in front of the House of Representatives; he used playful words and humors related to the context of the House of Representatives. Thus, it proves that Ustadz Abdul Somad could use appropriate type of communication to perform his *da'wah*. Moreover, everything he says is truthful as he always supports his explanation with the Qur'anic verses and *shahih* hadith. He never says bad things or looks down on others, and he also respects other people's view.

This finding is in line with the statements given by the interviewed participants who were asked about UAS' *da'wah*;

"I like watching UAS' da'wah because he conveys his da'wah in a fun way. It's like watching a stand-up comedy show [laughing]." (Participant 1, a man)

Another participant also mentioned that:

"I like watching UAS' da'wah because he explains rigorously by referring to the Qur'an and Hadith, and it makes me more confident in practicing Islamic teachings." (Participant 2, a man)

4.2. Non-verbal factors

The personality of Ustadz Abdul Somad himself also supports the success of his *da'wah*. He is simple and ordinary if compared to other Islamic preachers. Another factor that contributes to the success of Ustadz Abdul Somad in influencing people to perform the Islamic teachings through his *da'wah* is the presence of technology. What makes him different to other Islamic preachers who also gained popularity in the past, like K.H. Zainuddin M.Z. is because today, Ustadz Abdul Somad has access to SNS and internet that have dominated the life of people in Indonesia. Using this opportunity, the popularization of social media, Ustadz Abdul Somad tries to reach more people of different ages and professions by broadcasting his *da'wah* through YouTube channel and other social media on Internet, and it results in his national fame in Indonesia.

The findings above are in accordance with the statements given by the participants interviewed:

“UAS’ da’wah is interesting to watch. I like it because I can listen to his da’wah from YouTube while I am cooking in the kitchen.” (Participant 3, a woman)

Another participant also mentions that:

“Previously I did not know UAS, but because I often saw his da’wah on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, I have come to like it and have started to watch his da’wah since then.” (Participant 2, a man)

5. Conclusion

As a country with a large number of Muslims, Indonesia has established many Islamic institutions that produce great *da'ls*. Among those *da'ls*, Ustadz Abdul Somad can attract more people to listen and to watch his *da'wah* if compared to other Islamic preachers. This study has investigated the factors influencing the success of *da'wah* by Ustadz Abdul Somad by analyzing the *da'wah* videos he uploaded on YouTube. After analyzing the data, the result indicates that Ustadz Abdul Somad is famous due to the verbal and non-verbal factors. The verbal factors are the humors and playful words he likes to use in his *da'wah*, his comprehensive understanding of the Qur'an and Hadith which can provide clear answer to the questions asked by people of this era, and the appropriate words he chooses for his audience in delivering the *da'wah*. The non-verbal factors include the use of various platforms in disseminating *da'wah*, such as; YouTube

channel and Instagram, and also the simple ordinary and cheerful personality of Ustadz Abdul Somad which makes him closer to his audience, and the body language and humorous facial expression he uses in front of his audience. The findings of this study are expected to be beneficial for young *da'ls* so that they will become more prepared in spreading Islamic teaching in national and international scale.

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